

Sunday Homily

27th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

3 OCTOBER 2021

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III

“This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body.”

Illustration

Julia was excited at the prospect of her new job, teaching fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds a variety of subjects, including religion. She had passed her own exams at college with flying colours. She was young and attractive and was familiar with the culture of the day. She was looking forward to the challenge of helping other young people fulfil their dreams and she was especially excited at the prospect of trying to share her faith with them, when it seemed that so many others saw the teaching of religion as an impossible burden.

Nevertheless, nothing could have prepared her for what she was actually to encounter. The young people did indeed find her attractive and soon began to confide in her. There was Maria, the tormented soul who sat at the back, her face etched with frustration and anger: it transpired she had been appallingly abused by a close member of her family from early childhood. There was Stephen, a sullen and disruptive student, who countered his innate shyness by asserting himself whenever the opportunity arose. There was Brian, a confused young man with a chip on his shoulder, who had all the answers. She calculated that almost 50 per cent of her pupils were living either with a single parent or with a step-parent. Among the many subjects to be covered in that first term was Christian marriage. How on earth could she broach the subject with this group of people, many of whom were already scarred for life because of the unhappy marriages of their parents?

Gospel Teaching

Thank God, Julia was bright and capable. She quickly realised that before she looked at Jesus' teaching on marriage, she would need to convince these young people of his unconditional love for each of them and their families in all the mess that surrounded them and the society in which they were all struggling to cope and, hopefully, one day to make their mark. They looked at how Jesus dealt with people who came to him with different afflictions – physical, mental and spiritual – and they noted how he responded to them with love and compassion. What Julia may not have realised was that the person of Jesus was having a real influence on these youngsters, not so much because of what they learnt about him, but because of the love and compassion they realised she had for them.

When the time came for her to talk to them about Jesus' teaching on marriage, she was able to put it into context. Jesus was not going to be caught out by the Pharisees, but neither was he going to short-change his listeners. He stood by the teaching of the ancient scripture in Genesis that men and women were made for each other: they are called to be united as one body. But this would not be something that they could or would achieve by themselves. Such unity comes when we are also united with Christ and can treat each other with his love and compassion. As today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews reminds us, this was why Jesus lived among us: to share our sufferings so that we might become holy and share his glory.

Application

Although many in her class told Julia that they would never get married, saying that in their experience it was a recipe for disaster, deep down some of them were promising themselves that they would not make the same mistakes as their parents. In reality they dreamt of finding someone who would make them happy and with whom they could share their life and their love.

In this community gathered for Mass today, there are a thousand untold stories. We rejoice with those of you enjoying the ups and downs of life in stable and happy marriages, and pray that the Lord will continue to strengthen you and bless your homes and families. For those of you who are struggling to cope with the aftermath of divorce or separation, or who find yourselves in far-from-perfect circumstances of one kind or another, we hope and pray that you discover in this community the understanding and compassionate face of Christ. For him, no situation is beyond redemption.

Perhaps we might usefully spend a few quiet moments reflecting on how we as individuals and as a community could better support the families of our parish. Likewise we might ask whether we could be doing more to help those who are trying to rebuild their lives and families after the breakdown of their marriages.